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CONFLICT OF REVOLUTIONARY AUTHORITY: PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT VS. BERLIN SOVIET, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1918 [1]

The Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 saw the first appearance of workers' and soldiers' councils, called Soviets. In 1917 the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, acting for all the Russian Soviets, became the chief competitor of Kerensky's Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks, employing the slogan "All Powers to the Soviets", used the Petrograd Soviet in their drive for power. In the October Revolution the Soviets, dominated by the Bolsheviks, replaced the Provisional Government as the government of Russia.

In the German Revolution of November 1918 workers' and soldiers' councils, called *Räte*, were organized in imitation of the Russian Soviets.[2] The German Revolution created, as had the Russian

[1] This article is based on a paper presented at the European history section of the meeting of the (American) Southern Historical Association in Tulsa, Oklahoma, November 1960.

[2] "Rätewahlen," in Die Freiheit: Berliner Organ der Unabhängigen Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands, November 16, 1918 (evening); A. Stein, "Räteorganisation und Revolution," in ibid., November 17, 1918 (morning); Vorwärts: Berliner Volksblatt, Zentralorgan der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands, November 9, 1918 (1st, 3rd, and 5th Extraausgabe); November 10, 1918 (8th Extraausgabe); Leipziger Volkszeitung: Organ für die Interessen des gesamten werktätigen Volkes, November 5-9, 1918; "Wahl der Arbeiterräte," in Rote Fahne (Ehemaliger Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger), November 10, 1918. For further information on the German Revolution, the socialist parties, and the formation of the workers' and soldiers' councils, see Emil Barth, Aus der Werkstatt der deutschen Revolution (Berlin, 1919), pp. 24-56; A. Joseph Berlau, The German Social Democratic Party, 1914-1921 (New York, 1949), pp. 187-195; Eduard Bernstein, Die deutsche Revolution (Berlin, 1921), pp. 19-31; Wilhelm Dittmann, "Die Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands," in Handbuch der Politik (Berlin and Leipzig, 1921), III, 119; Ossip K. Flechtheim, Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik (Offenbach, 1948), pp. 1-36; Hermann Müller, Die November Revolution (Berlin, 1928), pp. 23-62; Richard Müller, Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik (2 vols., Vienna, 1925), II, 9-26; Gustav Noske, Von Kiel bis Kapp (Berlin, 1920), pp. 8-29; Eugen Prager, Geschichte der U.S.P.D. (Berlin, 1921), pp. 175-178; Arthur Rosenberg, Entstehung und Geschichte der Weimarer Republik, Herausgegeben von Kurt

Revolution, two revolutionary authorities. One was the Provisional Government, consisting of a political cabinet taking the name of Council of People's Representatives (*Rat der Volksbeauftragten*),[1] and the other one was the Executive Council of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils (*Vollzugsrat*). Both bodies were elected in a meeting of the Berlin workers' and soldiers' councils on the day after the revolution, which had occurred in Berlin on November 9, 1918, and after the two socialist parties [2] had agreed to the formation of a coalition. The political cabinet was composed of three majority socialists and three independent socialists, while the Executive Council had 24 members: six majority and six independent socialists as the delegates of the workers' councils, and 12 representatives of the Berlin soldiers without party affiliation.[3]

Kersten (2 vols. in one, Frankfort on the Main, 1955), pp. 208-246, 275-296; Philipp Scheidemann, Der Zusammenbruch (Berlin, 1921), pp. 193-208; John L. Snell, "Die Republik aus Versäumnissen," in Die Welt als Geschichte, XV (1955), pp. 196-219; Walter Tormin, Zwischen Rätediktatur und Sozialer Demokratie (Düsseldorf, 1954), pp. 55 ff.; E. O. Volkmann, Revolution über Deutschland (Oldenburg, 1936), pp. 11-68.

[1] The Provisional Government called itself, interchangeably, the "Council of People's Representatives," the "Cabinet," the "Reich Government," and the "Reich Leadership."

[2] The largest socialist party was the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [SPD]), also known as the Majority Socialists. The SPD, which tended to be reformist, had voted the war credits in the Reichstag since 1914. The socialists who opposed voting for the war credits, known as the Minority Socialists, had seceded from the SPD in 1917, and had formed the somewhat more radical Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [USPD]). There were also two semi-independent socialist organizations. One was the organization of the revolutionary shop stewards (revolutionäre Obleute), centered primarily in the metal industry in Berlin. Its leaders, who had organized the strikes of 1917 and 1918, were an important segment of the left wing of the USPD. The other organization was the Spartacus Union (Spartakusbund), led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. It was very loosely associated with the USPD, and transformed itself into the German Communist Party at the end of December 1918.

[3] For the formation and composition of the coalition cabinet, see Vorwärts, November 10, 1918 (7th Extraausgabe); November 10, 1918; November 11, 1918; Leipziger Volkszeitung, November 11, 1918; Rote Fahne, November 10, 1918; Die Internationale (früher: Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung), November 10, 1918; Bernstein, pp. 33-36, 45-46. For the composition of the Executive Council, see Allgemeiner Kongress der Arbeiter – und Soldatenräte Deutschlands vom 16. bis 21. Dezember 1918 im Abgeordnetenhause zu Berlin, Stenographische Berichte (Berlin, 1919), column 48 [Hereafter cited as Kongress]; Hermann Müller, p. 92. For the meeting of the workers' and soldiers' councils in the Zirkus Busch in Berlin on November 10, 1918, at which the Cabinet and the Executive Council were elected, see Vorwärts, November 11, 1918; Leipziger Volkszeitung, November 11, 1918; November 12, 1918; Mitteilungs-Blatt des Verbandes der sozialdemokratischen Wahlvereine Berlins und Umgegend, Unabhängige sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, November 17, 1918; Richard Müller in Kongress, col. 18;

In Germany, as previously in Russia, the revolution had thus created a dual authority. Each body was jealous if its prerogatives, and each attempted to enlarge its authority at the expense of the other.[1] The Provisional Government was supposed to be the executive, while the Executive Council had the power to dismiss the Cabinet and was supposed to supervise the government.[2] But the spheres of authority were not clearly defined, and jurisdictional conflicts occurred continually.[3] One leading socialist put it succinctly when he wrote that "the demarcation of authority between the People's Representatives and the Executive Council had not been predicted in the *Communist Manifesto*."[4]

The Executive Council's right of supervision became the major point of contention between the two revolutionary authorities. The

Barth, pp. 61-63. Lists of the state secretaries and socialist delegates in the Reich ministries can be found in Freiheit, Vorwärts, and Leipziger Volkszeitung, November 15, 1918 (morning); Berlau, p. 223n. On November 11, 1918, the socialist parties formed a coalition government in Prussia, which was ratified by the Executive Council: see Freiheit, November 15, 1918 (morning); November 28, 1918 (evening); Vorwärts, November 12, 28, 1918; Mitteilungs-Blatt, November 17, 1918; Berliner Tageblatt, November 28, 1918 (morning).

[1] Reichskanzlei (Alte Reichskanzlei), Akten betreffend: Protokolle der Kabinettssitzungen (Vorakten zu R. Min. 2b), microfilmed as Foreign Office/State Department: German War Documents Project, serial 8935H, November 18, 1918, vol. I. p. 9 (frame E626972) [Hereafter cited as RdV (date, volume, pages, and frames)]; Barth, pp. 71-72; Richard Müller, II, 55.

[2] The spheres of authority of the Cabinet and the Executive Council were delineated in a proclamation adopted in the Zirkus Busch meeting of the Berlin workers' and soldiers' councils on November 10, 1918. As the USPD and Spartacus did not have a daily newspaper in Berlin from November 10 to 15, this proclamation was not printed in any of the Berlin dailies, including the majority socialist Vorwärts. The text can be found in the leading USPD newspaper outside Berlin, Leipziger Volkszeitung (November 11, 1918). See also Richard Müller, II, 237-238; Kongress, col. 18-20.

[3] See the Cabinet's proclamation of November 12, 1918, in Reichsgesetzblatt 1918, pp. 1303-1304; Vorwärts, Leipziger Volkszeitung, Berliner Tageblatt, and Vossische Zeitung, November 13, 1918 (morning); Richard Müller, II, 237-238. The Prussian government's proclamation of November 13, 1918, in Preussische Gesetzsammlung 1918, pp. 187-189; Vorwärts, Berliner Tageblatt, and Vossische Zeitung, November 14, 1918 (morning); Richard Müller, II, 239-240. The Executive Council's proclamation of November 11, 1918, in Vorwärts, November 13, 1918; Mitteilungsblatt, November 17, 1918; Richard Müller, II, 235-236. See also "Die ersten Gesetze der Deutschen Republik," in Vorwärts, November 14, 1918; "Die Regierung Ebert-Haase und die A. und S.-Räte," in Rote, Fahne. Zentralorgan des Spartakusbundes, December 10, 1918; Kongress, col. 29; Ledebour in RdV, December 7, 1918, I, 96 (E627059). The chairman of the Executive Council lamented that "the Executive Council's powers were undefined. It had all the power and it had no power." Richard Müller, II, 54.

[4] Hermann Müller, p. 127.

Executive Council maintained that their right of supervision entailed a daily control of the government. The Council's representatives established themselves as supervisors in the various ministries, where they functioned in addition to the supervisors appointed by the Cabinet.[1] The Cabinet contended that the Executive Council had no right to supervise anyone below cabinet level, and demanded the cessation of all interference in the operations of the administration.[2] The Executive Council countered with the argument that supervision would be meaningless without a direct control over the government's agencies.[3] The Cabinet answered that supervision could only be applied to the Cabinet, which could be removed by the Executive Council, but that it could not permit the establishment of a second executive.[4] The Executive Council replied that the right to dismiss the Cabinet was an illusion, and accused the cabinet members of being a "six-headed absolutism".[5] To this one of the cabinet members could only retort: "I wish all absolute monarchs could have been removed as easily as we six People's Representatives." [6]

It thus appeared as if the Russian events of the previous year might repeat themselves in Germany in 1918. But the German Revolution did not, as had been feared by the moderates and hoped by the radicals, follow the Russian pattern. In Russia the Soviets had replaced the Provisional Government. In Germany the Provisional Government defeated the Soviets. In the conflict of revolutionary authority the German Provisional Government was able to frustrate every attempt of the Berlin Executive Council to dominate the Cabinet and to control the ministries. Slowly, during November and early December, the Executive Council had to retreat from position after

[1] RdV, November 20, 1918, I, 22 (E626985); November 21, 1918, I, 24 (E626987); November 22, 1918, I, 40 (E627003); December 2, 1918, I, 70 (E627033); Landsberg in Kongress, col. 80; Obuch in ibid., col. 291-294; ibid., col. 30; Freiheit, November 18, 1918 (morning); Rosa Luxemburg, "Um den Vollzugsrat," in Rote Fahne, December 11, 1918; Richard Müller, II, 145-147; Hermann Müller, pp. 133-134.

[2] RdV, November 18, 1918, I, 14-15 (E626977-8); December 13, 1918, I, 192-194 (E627155-7); Rote Fahne, December 14, 1918; proclamation of the Cabinet, in Vorwärts, November 12, 1918; proclamation of the Prussian government, in Preussische Gesetzsammlung 1918, p. 191; "Keine unbefugten Eingriffe!" in Vorwärts, November 14, 1918.

[3] RdV, November 18, 1918, I, 9 (E626972); Richard Müller in Kongress, col. 30-33.

[4] RdV, December 4, 1918, I, 78 (E627041); Landsberg in Kongress, col. 79-80; Scheidemann, pp. 218-219.

[5] Obuch in Kongress, col. 293; Richard Müller at the meeting of the Berlin workers' councils on December 23, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 24, 1918 (morning).

[6] Landsberg in Kongress, col. 297.

position,[1] recognizing the Cabinet's claim of non-interference.[2]

In the middle of December the All-German Congress of Councils met to elect a national successor of the Berlin Executive Council. By this time the Cabinet was only paying lip service to the authority of the Council, completely disregarding its wishes and commands.[3] The Executive Council finally placed its grievances before the All-German Congress. But the Congress ensured the Cabinet's victory by rejecting the Executive Council's claim of direct supervision, leaving the Council's successor only the theoretical power to dismiss the Cabinet.[4]

After only five weeks the Provisional Government had defeated the Executive Council. The Council had been so badly defeated that even the extremely radical Rosa Luxemburg referred to it as the "sarco-

[1] Rosa Luxemburg, "Um den Vollzugsrat," in Rote Fahne, December 11, 1918. The Cabinet foiled the attempt of the Executive Council to form a red guard: proclamation of the Executive Council calling for the formation of a red guard, in Leipziger Volkszeitung, November 14, 1918; retraction of the proclamation, in Vorwärts, November 14, 15, 1918; meeting of the Berlin soldiers' councils on November 13, 1918, in Vorwärts, November 15, 1918; "Täuschende Parolen," in Freiheit, November 15, 1918 (morning); Herman Müller, p. 118; Richard Müller, II, 137-139. The Executive Council's attempt to influence foreign affairs was prevented by the Cabinet (the Council had to retract its invitation to a Russian delegation, and the Cabinet disregarded the Council's demand that Solf and Erzberger be removed from the foreign office and the armistice commission respectively): meeting of the Executive Council on November 29, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, November 30, 1918 (morning); meeting on December 4, 1918, in Freiheit, December 5, 1918; ibid., November 28, 1918 (morning); December 3, 12, 1918 (morning); Vorwärts, November 28, 1918; Rosa Luxemburg, "Der Vollzugsrat kuscht," in Rote Fahne, December 12, 1918; Kongress, col. 31-33; Hermann Müller, pp. 157-159; Richard Müller, II, 149-151. Early in December 1918 the Cabinet once again refused to admit the Executive Council's supervisors into the ministries: RdV, December 4, 1918, I, 78 (E627041); meeting of the Executive Council on December 12, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 13, 1918 (morning and evening); Hermann Müller, pp. 135-138.

[2] Agreement between the Cabinet and the Executive Council on November 23, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, November 23, 1918 (evening); Genossen! Kameraden! (leaflet by the Executive Council, November 23, 1918, in Hoover Library); RdV, November 20, 1918, I, 20-21 (E626983-4); Hermann Müller, pp. 130-131; Richard Müller, II, 253. See also the Executive Council's proclamation on November 23, 1918, in Freiheit, November 25, 1918 (evening); Vorwärts, Rote Fahne, November 26, 1918; Richard Müller, II, 255-257.

[3] Freiheit, December 16, 1918 (morning); Richard Müller in Kongress, col. 28-31; Rosa Luxemburg, "Um den Vollzugsrat," in Rote Fahne, December 11, 1918; Karl Liebknecht at the meeting of the Berlin USPD on December 15, 1918, in Freiheit, December 16, 1918 (morning). Matthias Erzberger, the bourgeois head of the armistice commission, refused even to receive the representative of the Executive Council: Hermann Müller, p. 137.

[4] Richard Müller's report to the congress, in Kongress, col. 13 ff. See also the debates and votes on the "resolution Lüdemann" and the "Haase declaration" (demarcation of authority between the Cabinet and the Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils), in ibid., col. 176-177, 252, 288-300, 309.

phagus of the revolution".[1] Why was the Berlin Executive Council unable to duplicate the achievements of the Petrograd Soviet? What accounts for the Council's rapid and complete defeat?

From the very beginning the Provisional Government occupied a far stronger position than the Executive Council. Although the two bodies were both products of the revolution and had been elected by the same meeting of the Berlin workers' and soldiers' councils, the Provisional Government always appeared as the more legitimate partner. The legal fiction that the last imperial chancellor had appointed the majority socialist Friedrich Ebert as his successor, who thereupon had formed the coalition cabinet which was ratified by the meeting of the Berlin councils, gave the Provisional Government a permanent advantage over the Executive Council.[2] The Cabinet was the government of the Reich, a term the revolution continued to use, representing the various parts of the nation. The Cabinet became the symbol of national unity, and the armies swore allegiance to it, and not to the Executive Council.[3] The Cabinet signed the armistice and conducted the foreign affairs of the nation, while the *Entente* refused even to deal with the councils.[4] There slowly emerged a picture of the Cabinet as the legitimate, national, German Government, and of the Executive Council as the revolutionary, local, Berlin organization. The anti-Berlin sentiment of the nation became a potent weapon in the hands of the Provisional Government. The provincials accused the Executive Council of attempting to establish a Berlin dictatorship, and of subordinating the interests of the nation to those of radical Berlin.[5] In an attempt to combat this hostility, the Executive Council on November 25 coopted delegates form various parts of the Reich, raising the number of members on the Council from 24 to 45.[6] But this attempt to mollify local antagonism did not succeed, and the

[1] Rosa Luxemburg, "Der Vollzugsrat kuscht," in Rote Fahne, December 12, 1918.

[2] Vorwärts, November 9, 1918 (2nd and 6th Extraausgabe); Max von Baden, Erinnerungen und Dokumente (Berlin, 1927), pp. 630-643; Scheidemann, p. 212.

[3] Kongress, col. 29, 75-76, 90; Bernstein, p. 65.

[4] Meeting of the Executive Council on December 12, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 13, 1918 (morning); "Ententepläne gegen die Revolution?" in Freiheit, December 11, 1918 (evening); ibid., November 20, 1918 (morning); December 14, 19, 20, 1918 (morning); Vorwärts, November 20, 1918; December 2, 1918 (evening); December 3, 11, 1918 (morning).

[5] Richard Müller in Kongress, col. 14-15; Hermann Müller in ibid., col. 60; Landsberg in ibid., col. 76; Ledebour in RdV, December 7, 1918, I, 96-97 (E627058-9); Landsberg in RdV, December 28, 1918, II, 57-58 (E627215-6); "Die Panikmache," in Freiheit, November 24, 1918 (morning); Hermann Müller, pp. 106, 133, 139; Richard Müller, II, 159-160.

[6] Kongress, p. iii; col. 20-21; Freiheit, November 24, 1918.

opposition to the "Berlin pigsty" increased constantly.[1] This anti-Berlin sentiment was supported by stories, usually false, about the corruption and inefficiency of the Berlin Council. In December a news release, originating from quarters close to the Cabinet, accused the workers' and soldiers' councils of having wasted 800 million Marks.[2] This story, with variations, was repeated constantly, and was finally applied to the Executive Council itself.[3] The provincials, distrustful of the Executive Council, backed the Cabinet by challenging the right of the Council to supervise the Reich government.[4]

The Provisional Government was not only able to appear as the champion of the national idea, but it also came to represent the democratic aspects of the revolution. The Executive Council, on the other hand, was looked upon as the representative of radicalism and Bolshevik dictatorship. Thus, the Provisional Government had promised the nation a national assembly in its first proclamation.[5] The Cabinet became the leading proponent of universal suffrage, and the members of the Cabinet always supported democratic elections.[6] The Executive Council came to represent the opposite viewpoint. The Executive Council had issued a proclamation in opposition to the

[1] Meeting of the Berlin workers' councils on December 23, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts December 24, 1918 (morning).

[2] The report originated with the news agency Hofrichter (formerly directed by the majority socialist Baake, who became, during the revolution, state secretary in the Reich chancellery), and was circulated by WTB: Vorwärts, December 2, 1918 (evening); A. Hofrichter, "Die Finanzen der A.- und S.-Räte," in ibid., December 11, 1918 (morning); "Vergeudete Millionen?" in Freiheit, December 4, 1918 (evening); "Die Ausgaben der A.- und S.-Räte," in ibid., December 7, 1918 (evening); Richard Müller, II, 123.

[3] Richard Müller in Kongress, col. 15, 24-25; Hermann Müller in ibid., col. 59. The financial status of the Executive Council was chaotic. It had to finance its operation with confiscated money, as the Cabinet refused to approve the Council's budget. See Max Maynz, majority socialist treasurer of the Executive Council, in Kongress, col. 36-38; Landsberg in ibid., col. 78-79; Ledebour in ibid,. col. 84; Scheidemann in ibid., col. 166, 170; Ledebour and Richard Müller in ibid,. col. 152; RdV, December 5, 1918, I, 86 (E627049); December 7, 1918, I, 101-102 (E627064-5); December 13, 1918, I, 190-191 (E627153-4); December 14, 1918, II, 1-2 (E627159-60); December 28, 1918, II, 157 (E627315); Richard Müller, II, 160.

[4] H. Limbertz, majority socialist delegate from Essen, in Kongress, col. 50-51; a majority socialist delegate from Augsburg, in ibid., col. 62; Gottlieb Reese, majority socialist delegate from Saarbrücken, in idib., 103-105.

[5] See above, p. 165, note 3.

[6] Press conference by Ebert, in Vorwärts, November 11, 1918; press conference by Landsberg, in Freiheit, November 17, 1918 (morning); Ebert and Haase at the conference of the German states on November 25, 1918, in ibid., November 26, 1918 (morning); Haase at the meeting of the Berlin USPD on December 15, 1918, in ibid., December 16, 1918 (morning). See also Rudolf Hilferding, "Revolutionäres Vertrauen," in ibid., November 18, 1918; Rote Fahne, December 6, 1918.

bourgeois-democratic republic, and had warned against the election of a national assembly.[1] Prominent members of the Council showed themselves unfriendly to the idea of democratic elections.[2] Famous was the statement made by the chairman of the Executive Council, Richard Müller, who told a meeting of the Berlin workers' councils on November 19: "The rapid calling of the constituent assembly would be our death sentence. I have risked my life for the revolution. The road to the constituent assembly will lead across my dead body." [3] This statement, which was to earn Richard Müller the derogatory name of *Leichenmüller*, was quoted over and over again by the enemies of the Executive Council.[4]

The animosity against the Executive Council, fanned by newspaper stories about corruption, inefficiency, and radicalism,[5] erupted in a right wing *Putsch* on December 6. The *Putsch*, cleverly prepared, was preceeded by a vicious anti-semitic leaflet campaign. Jews, criminals, draft dodgers, and the Executive Council were all lumped together; one leaflet ended with the pronouncement: "Headquarters of the Executive Council – Synagogue in the House of Representatives." [6] The *Putsch* started with the attempt of the soldiers to proclaim the cabinet member Ebert president of the republic, continued with the arrest of the Executive Council, and ended with the massacre of communist demonstrators on the streets of Berlin.[7] This attempt to overthrow the Executive Council by force was suppressed by the

[1] Proclamation of November 17, 1918, in Kongress, col. 16-17.

[2] Richard Müller at the meeting of the Verwaltungsstelle Berlin des deutschen Metallarbeiterverbandes on November 17, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, November 20, 1918 (morning); Paul Wegmann at the meeting of the Berlin workers' councils on November 29, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, November 30, 1918 (morning); RdV, November 23, 1918, I, 42-43 (E627005-6). See also "Der Juncker vom anderen Ende," in Vorwärts, November 30, 1918.

[3] Vorwärts, November 20, 1918.

[4] A. Z., "Der lebende Leichnam," in Vorwärts, December 5, 1918 (morning); "Richard I-Wilhelms-Ersatz," in ibid., December 18, 1918 (morning); "Die Demokratie auf dem Marsche!" in Rote Fahne, December 1, 1918.

[5] Emil Barth, "An den Laternenpfahl!" in Freiheit, December 11, 1918 (morning); "Das bequeme und angenehme Leben," in Rote Fahne, December 9, 1918.

[6] Hermann Müller, p. 109; Richard Müller, II, 157-158. See also "An die niedrigsten Instinkte," in Die Republik (editor Wilhelm Herzog), December 5, 1918; "Gesindel," in Freiheit, December 7, 1918 (morning); "Selbsthilfe gegen die Hetze," in Rote Fahne, December 9, 1918; proclamation of the Executive Council, in Freiheit, December 9, 1918; proclamation of the Executive Council, in ibid., December 14, 1918 (morning).

[7] For the details of the Putsch of December 6, see Freiheit, Vorwärts, Rote Fahne, Berliner Tageblatt, and Vossische Zeitung, December 7-9, 1918.

Cabinet, but it showed the Council's lack of power and public support.[1]

Yet it might be appropriate to ask whether the popular image of the national, democratic Provisional Government in opposition to the local, dictatorial Executive Council reflected reality. It was maintained that the members of the cabinet represented the entire nation, while the membership of the Executive Council did not. But was this true? The cabinet members were indeed nationally prominent socialists. The majority socialists had sent Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann, and Otto Landsberg into the Cabinet. Ebert was the chairman of the party, Scheidemann was a member of the party's executive committee, and Landsberg was a prominent member of the *Reichstag*. The independent socialists were represented in the Cabinet by Hugo Haase, Wilhelm Dittmann, and Emil Barth. Haase was the chairman of the independent party, Dittmann was a member of its central committee, and Barth was a leader of the radical and powerful organization of the revolutionary shop stewards. Two of these six men would some day sit in the cabinets of the Weimar Republic, one would become chancellor, and one was destined to be Weimar's first president.

But the Executive Council also included prominent members. Two members of the independent socialists' central committee, Georg Ledebour and Ernst Däumig, sat in the council, and the chairman of the workers' section of the Council, Richard Müller, was another leader of the revolutionary shop stewards. The majority socialists were represented by the influential member of the *Reichstag* Max Cohen, and the chairman of the soldiers' section of the Council, Brutus Molkenbuhr, was the son of an important member of the party's executive committee. The majority socialists also delegated their treasurer into the Council, the future Prussian prime minister Otto Braun. When Braun entered the Prussian government, he was replaced by the executive committee member Hermann Müller, a

[1] See proclamation of the Cabinet, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 8, 1918; RdV, December 7, 1918, I, 91 (E627054); Emil Eichhorn, Meine Tätigkeit im Berliner Polizeipräsidium (Berlin, 1918), p. 40. Also joint declaration of the Cabinet and the Executive Council on December 9, 1918, reaffirming the division of authority agreed upon on November 23, 1918 (see above, p. 167, note 2): Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 10, 1918 (morning). The relations between the Cabinet and the Executive Council, the status of the two revolutionary bodies, and the behavior of the cabinet members during the Putsch of December 6, 1918, are discussed at a joint meeting of the Cabinet and Executive Council on December 7, 1918: RdV, December 7, 1918, I, 94-108 (E627057-71); Kongress, col. 87-88, 160.

future chairman of the party and chancellor of the Weimar Republic.[1]

The claim of the Cabinet to be the champion of democracy vis-a-vis the radical Executive Council does not reflect the composition of these bodies either. Although the independent socialists in the Council tended to be more radical than their colleagues in the Cabinet, they were confronted by a majority of moderate socialists. The proportion of radicals was even smaller in the Executive Council than in the Cabinet.[2] Yet it can not be denied that the Executive Council, regardless of its composition, tended to be more radical than the Provisional Government.[3] How can this radicalism, however exaggerated, be explained?

The answer must be found in the milieu in which the two bodies operated. The members of the Cabinet, occupying the former offices of a Bismarck, seemed to absorb the atmosphere of authority left behind by their predecessors.[4] They worried about the future of Germany, the lost war, the economic collapse, and the terrible food shortage.[5] It is interesting to note how the heavy burden of governmental responsibility changed even as radical a socialist as Emil Barth. Oppressed by the fear of Germany's economic collapse, Barth publicly objected to the many strikes, maintaining that it is treason "to degrade the revolution into a movement for higher wages."[6] He

[1] The names of the members of the SPD Executive Committee can be found in Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands . . . in Würzburg . . . 1917 (Berlin, 1917), p. 469. The members of the USPD Central Committee are listed in Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Gründungs-Parteitags der U.S.P.D. vom 6. bis 8. April 1917 in Gotha. Mit Anhang: Bericht über die Gemeinsame Konferenz der Arbeitsgemeinschaft und der Spartakusgruppe vom 7. Januar 1917 in Berlin, Herausgegeben von Emil Eichhorn (Berlin, 1921), p. 71. For Däumig's position on the USPD Central Committee, see signatures of the committee members in Freiheit, November 15, 1918 (morning). For the composition of the Executive Council, see Hermann Müller, pp. 91, 98-99, 101-102.

[2] Hermann Müller, pp. 92, 100, 105; Barth, p. 89; Richard Müller, II, 53; Freiheit, December 17, 1918 (evening).

[3] See the speech by Ernst Däumig in defense of the Executive Council at the 2nd Congress of the Communist International in 1920: Kommunistische Internationale, Der Zweite Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale. Protokoll der Verhandlungen . . . in Petrograd und . . . 1920 in Moskau (Hamburg, 1921), p. 368.

[4] Jacob Altmaier, Frankfurter Revolutionstage (Frankfort on the Main, 1919), pp. 49-50. See also "Die weinenden Erben," in Rote Fahne, December 4, 1918.

[5] This fear about the future of Germany shows itself in the discussions at most of the meetings of the Cabinet: RdV, passim. See also Ebert in Kongress, col. 3-4; Paul Levi, "Und nun? – der Friede?" in Rote Fahne, November 19, 1918.

[6] Barth at the meeting of the Berlin workers' councils on November 27, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, November 28, 1918 (morning and evening); "Berliner Arbeiterrat und Streikbewegung," in Rote Fahne, November 28, 1918; Barth, p. 29.

sided with his colleagues in the Cabinet on the question of the Executive Council's right of supervision, and he objected to radical economic experiments.[1] The left called him a "renegade", communist demonstrators booed him; and he in turn challenged Karl Liebknecht to a public debate.[2] It was Emil Barth, the radical shop steward, who best expressed the Cabinet's fears about Germany's future when he told the All-German Congress in his own inimitably colloquial way: "We are stuck in the mud. Thousands of meters all around us there is no solid land, and only the tips of our noses still appear above the ground." [3]

The Executive Council worked in a completely different atmosphere. The radicals considered it the nerve-center of the revolution, the Berlin counter-part of the Petrograd Soviet.[4] Even the sober majority socialist Hermann Müller could not completely escape the influence of the revolutionary milieu,[5] while the radical Däumig turned down the important position of delegate to the ministry of war, because "he would not permit himself to be buried in the war ministry." [6] The members of the Executive Council lived in a world of constant revolutionary excitement, in a world of perpetual mass meetings. They were always besieged by deputations, constantly faced by large demonstrations, which Richard Müller called the "revolution's handwriting on the wall".[7] The Executive Council's headquarters, once the stately home of Prussian absolutism, the *Landtag* and the House of

[1] Barth, pp. 71-72; Barth in Kongress, col. 106, 328; Barth's attack on Rosa Luxemburg at the meeting of the Berlin USPD on December 15, 1918, in Freiheit, December 16, 1918 (morning); Barth at the meeting of the Verwaltungsstelle Berlin des deutschen Metallarbeiterverbandes on November 17, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, November 20, 1918 (morning); "Barths Fantasien," in Rote Fahne, December 11, 1918.

[2] Barth at the meeting of the Berlin workers' councils on November 29, 1918, in Freiheit, November 30, 1918 (morning); Vorwärts, December 9, 1918 (morning); Rote Fahne, November 30, 1918. See also the official communist history of the revolution: Illustrierte Geschichte der Deutschen Revolution (Berlin, 1929), p. 248.

[3] Kongress, col. 295.

[4] Hermann Müller, p. 104; Friedrich Stampfer, "Die Reichsregierung und die Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte," in Vorwärts, November 13, 1918. It is interesting to note that radical USPD members like Ledebour had refused to enter the Provisional Government together with the SPD on November 10, 1918, but that they did not object to the presence of SPD members in the Executive Council: Ledebour in Kongress, col. 95; Der Ledebour Prozess (Berlin, 1919), p. 35; Haase at the meeting of the Berlin USPD on December 15, 1918, in Freiheit, December 16, 1918 (morning).

[5] Hermann Müller, p. 104. Several times a week Hermann Müller visited Ebert at night to explain the actions of the Executive Council and to settle conflicts between the Cabinet and the Council: ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 103; Richard Müller, II, 47.

[7] Kongress, col. 149. See also Heinrich Schäfer, Tagebuchblätter eines rheinischen Sozialisten (Bonn, 1919), pp. 63-70.

Lords, reflected this revolutionary atmosphere. It is well described by a majority socialist: "A single night had swept away the old rubbish, and in the ministerial chamber of the illustrious nobles from the East Prussian castles sit the proletarians from Berlin southwest, Friedenau and Rixdorf, debating for hours and deliberating about the fate of Germany." [1]

Yet the false popular image, which considered the Cabinet as national and moderate, while looking upon the Executive Council as local and radical, was not the only advantage the cabinet members had over their competitors. The Cabinet commanded an efficient and well-functioning bureaucracy, which gave the Provisional Government a stability the Executive Council did not possess. The Council had to create its own administrative machine, and appeared to be in constant chaos.[2] The feelings of the German citizen, who admired organization and abhorred inefficiency, were accurately reflected by the comment of the leading majority socialist newspaper: "The entire history of the Executive Council has been a history of mistakes, confusion, adventures, hasty decrees, withdrawal of decrees, a chain of distressing incidents." [3]

This appearance of chaos was aggravated by the unfortunate composition of the Executive Council. One half of its members had been delegated by the Berlin soldiers, and, unlike the politically active workers, these representatives were unknown and inexperienced men.[4] One of them arrested the minister of war, while others became obnoxious meddlers in the affairs of the ministries.[5] The soldiers' delegates established themselves in big offices, often staffed by relatives and friends. The chairman of the Executive Council had to go

[1] Altmaier, p. 49. See also Hermann Müller, pp. 89-91.

[2] Richard Müller in Kongress, col. 24, 149, 152; A.S., "Mangelnde Organisation," in Freiheit, November 30, 1918 (evening); "Revolution oder Durcheinander?" in Vorwärts, November 28, 1918 (evening); Rosa Luxemburg, "Der Vollzugsrat kuscht," in Rote Fahne, December 12, 1918; Erich Dombrowski, "Das Durcheinander," in Berliner Tageblatt, November 29, 1918 (evening).

[3] Vorwärts, December 17, 1918 (morning).

[4] Richard Müller in Kongress, col. 21-22, 35; Hermann Müller, pp. 92 ff.; Karl Liebknecht, "Der neue Burgfrieden," in Rote Fahne, November 19, 1918; Karl Liebknecht, "Das, was ist," in ibid., November 21, 1918. See also the debate about the medical student Bergmann, soldier delegate on the Executive Council, at the meeting of the Berlin soldiers' councils on December 8, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 9, 1918 (morning).

[5] Meeting of the Berlin soldiers' councils on December 8, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 9, 1918 (morning); Kongress, col. 22-23, 48-50; Meeting of the Executive Council on November 26, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, November 27, 1918 (morning); "Unklare Stimmen," in Freiheit, November 29, 1918 (morning); "Verbrauchte Männer," in Rote Fahne, November 29, 1918; Hermann Müller, pp. 92-93, 97-98; Richard Müller, II, 53, 154-156.

on nightly tours of inspection to eject the constantly increasing office staffs.[1] But when the Council finally expelled some of these soldiers, they complained to the meetings of the Berlin soldiers' councils, causing tumultuous scenes in opposition to the Executive Council.[2]

The most bizarre case involved a Lieutenant Walz. He had joined the Berlin radicals shortly before the revolution, and had become their military adviser. The victorious revolution lifted him into the Executive Council. Using the Council as his base, he established himself as supervisor in the ministry of war. As one member of the Executive Council remarked, "Napoleon had started as a lieutenant of artillery. What limits were there for Walz, the lieutenant of engineers, once the German Revolution occurred?" [3] Unfortunately for Walz, and for the Executive Council, he had been arrested a few days before the revolution, and had talked freely under police interrogation. This was discovered by the radicals at the end of November, and the Executive Council gave him three days to get out of Berlin. Walz agreed, promising to disappear quietly. But, changing his mind, he took his case to the meeting of the Berlin soldiers' councils on December 5, where violent scenes and demonstrations for and against Walz interrupted the reading of his dossier. Walz lost his case, but the entire Executive Council appeared besmirched from the affair.[4]

The Executive Council was not only crippled by the absence of a well-functioning organization, it also weakened its position by undertaking too many difficult tasks. The Council not only attempted to supervise the Reich government, but also the governments of Prussia and Berlin. It wanted to influence foreign affairs, military affairs, and the administration of the state, while at the same time it

[1] Richard Müller, II, 153.

[2] Meeting of the Berlin soldiers' councils on December 5, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 6, 1918 (morning); meeting on December 11, 1918, in Freiheit, December 12, 1918 (morning); meeting on December 14, 1918, in Freiheit, Vorwärts, December 15, 1918. The soldier delegate on the Executive Council, Strobel, was removed from his position on the Council after publishing an anti-semitic diatribe in a right wing newspaper: Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany (New York, 1954), p. 405n. For the Strobel affair, see also the meeting of the Executive Council on December 13, 1918, in Freiheit, December 14, 1918 (evening); Hermann Müller, p. 97.

[3] Hermann Müller, p. 93.

[4] Meeting of the Berlin soldiers' councils on November 28, 1918, in Freiheit, November 29, 1918 (morning), Vorwärts, November 29, 1918 (evening), Rote Fahne, November 30, 1918. See also Ledebour in Kongress, col. 84; Richard Müller in ibid., col. 150; Landsberg in ibid., col. 167; Freiheit, Vorwärts, November 21, 1918 (morning); Hermann Müller, pp. 93-96.

wasted its strength in an attempt to settle every strike in Berlin.[1] The exasperated Hermann Müller warned the Council about this diffusion of activities: "An organization which has the ambition of being remembered by history together with the Committee of Public Safety of the great French Revolution, must be careful not to become a branch of the department of labor." [2]

It was no accident, considering all the advantages of the Provisional Government, that the Executive Council was defeated in the conflict of revolutionary authority. By the time the All-German Congress of Councils met in Berlin in the middle of December, the victory of the Cabinet over the Executive Council was assured. The defenders of the Executive Council could talk as much as they wanted to, but the delegates had already decided to support the Provisional Government. One symbolic illustration of this victory was the shout of one of the delegates during an impassioned speech by Ledebour in defense of the Executive Council: "Let's go to lunch and leave him here to talk." [3]

[1] Richard Müller in Kongress, col. 21, 24; ibid., col. 63-64; Meeting of the Executive Council on December 13, 1918, in Freiheit, December 14, 1918 (evening); letter by Richard Müller, in Rote Fahne, December 4, 1918.

[2] Hermann Müller, p. 111.

[3] Kongress, col. 172.